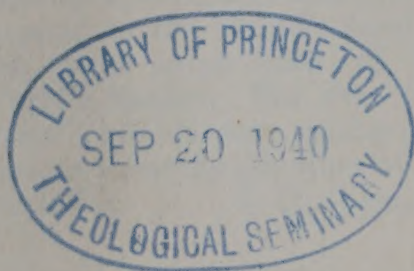


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Proportionate Giving

By
ROBERT E. SPEER



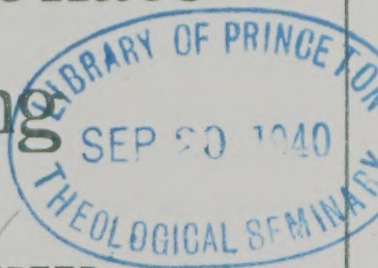
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Proportionate Giving

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Proportionate Giving

ROBERT E. SPEER

WE HAVE great grounds for encouragement and thanksgiving as we come together in this conference today. The progress that has been made in the last ten or fifteen years in the acceptance of better methods of giving throughout the Church has been a progress far in excess of the hopes of many of those who have been most active in this campaign. Mr. McConaughy stated that about sixty per cent. of all our churches of twenty-five members or over have already adopted in some form the new and better plans of giving. It is quite true that these plans have not been adopted in their completeness in all these churches, but it represents a great gain that three-fifths of the churches of over twenty-five members have responded to the reasonable presentations that have been made on behalf of this movement in these past few years.

It is a further ground of encouragement that there has been such a great advance in the amount of giving as an inevitable result of this wider adoption of good plans. The gifts of the churches in their church offerings as well as through every other channel of benevolence have advanced immensely in the last fifteen

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years, and, while in this, as in every such movement, many causes enter in, it cannot be denied that the work that is being done in this particular direction has contributed perhaps as largely as any other cause to this increase.

It is a still further ground of encouragement that such a spirit of common understanding and unity of feeling and purpose pervades the Church and all the missionary agencies of the Church today, and that we can gather here in this Conference this morning and this afternoon in the interest of all the activities of the Church, conscious of their unity and eager only that the whole work of the Church should be done.

Further occasions of thanksgiving and gratitude might easily be added to these, but there are some things that need to be set down on the other side of the account, and which as honest and sincere men we are anxious to deal with.

For one thing, the increase of gifts has been woefully inadequate, and, measured against the possibilities and opportunities of today, it is a question whether we are in a much better position than ten or fifteen years ago. The advance that has been made has been utterly inadequate. Secondly, it is not only open to question, probably it is indisputable, that the

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increased giving has not kept pace with our increased ability to give. Doubtless with many here in this room today there has been no increased ability to give, but when we look at the Church as a whole and at the country as a whole the possibility of giving has doubled or quadrupled as compared with what it was ten or fifteen years ago. What is given represents a smaller proportion of what could be given now than it represented ten or fifteen or forty or seventy-five years ago. Still further is the possibility of danger latent in the very hopefulness of our present situation. We may satisfy the churches with the adoption of a partial program and their satisfaction may make them unwilling to adopt the other elements of the program. After all, systematic giving is only methodical giving. It does not follow that it is righteous giving—adequate giving. We might lead ourselves into an injurious situation if all that we are accomplishing now should make habitual with the Church an inadequate performance of her duty. It seems to me that the Church stands face to face with a very dangerous situation in this regard, and that we are bound to take it upon us now to re-examine here our undertaking and to see whether we are actually leading the churches to adopt those elements of a program

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which are the most vital and fundamental ones. And now is the time for us to do this because it is a fact that the introduction of one new radical idea makes it easier to introduce also other ideas, when the mind of the Church is jarred open and she begins to adopt plans of action that come closer to the ideal.

The question that has troubled a great many men throughout the Church with regard to our present movement is, how can we combine with the general acceptance of the method of systematic giving the acceptance also of a living principle of *proportionate* giving. For after all system is only a matter of method, not essentially a matter of principle. What we wish to introduce is some living and uplifting principle. We believe that this can only be found in the acceptance of the Christian principle of stewardship; of giving not only on a methodical basis but on a basis of just proportion. But in this as in everything general principles do not sufficiently bite. The principle needs to carry with itself some form of application by which it can be easily related at once to action on the part of common Christian men and women. What I want to say is in behalf of the acceptance of the principle of tithe giving as the practical basis of proportionate giving.

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Let us lay aside at the outset all legal ideas. There is no such thing as the law of the tithe. There is a principle of the tithe. Let us dismiss from our minds once and for all every legalistic and statutory idea in the Kingdom of God. The wrong of committing murder does not consist in the fact that the ten commandments forbid it. The ten commandments forbid it because it is wrong. Right and wrong lie on fundamental foundations beneath statutes. They are right and wrong not because God says so but because of God's character. This matter of tithe giving we are not to think of as a symbol of legal Judaism. Its claim upon us rests upon moral considerations that would have made tithe giving the duty of man even if the Jewish law had not been enacted. Revelation does not create moral ideals; it only expresses moral ideals that lie in the will of God. If the principle of the tithe is to be operative in the present day, accordingly it must be operative because of the broad moral considerations that underlie it, which, as a matter of fact, made the principle of tithe giving operative long before it was ever expressed in any of the legal enactments of the Old Testament legislation. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews that the principle was held to have existed in life long before the legis-

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lation came into being. Just so the observance of the Sabbath Day does not rest for us upon the fourth commandment; it would be just as valid and real to us today if we had never had any decalogue at all. The life principle and privilege of the tithe is a working scheme of proportionate giving by which we can make the principle of stewardship actual and living. I should like to suggest just a few of these practical moral considerations on which it rests.

First of all, *the gospel ought to lead and enable men to do more than pagans and Jews.* The Jew in the old dispensation was expected to bring his tithe in addition to his taxes and his various offerings. The generosity of many pagans equals the old Jewish standards. We do not need to enter into the motives that led them to give. The mere fact is that many of the non-Christian people, like the Jews, have given much more than tithes. Now our Lord said unequivocally that principles were to be judged by their results; that modes and motives of action cannot claim the allegiance of man because of any beauty of their expression. By their fruits they were to be tested. Unless the motives of the gospel are able to lead men to give more generously than Jews and pagans gave, then the motives of the

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Gospel must be inferior to Judaism and paganism.

Secondly, *the Jew and the pagan faced no less difficulties* in the way of practising a principle like this *than we face*. We face no greater difficulties than they faced. As a matter of fact they did face greater difficulties than we. The Jew was a poor man and lived in a poor land. He had no such currency passing through his hands as passes through ours. He gave of his orchards and fields or he set aside one-tenth of his soil that its produce might be regarded as not his own, but God's. If these men then, and these men now, out in those darkened lands will override this difficulty, and in spite of poverty and limitation will do this, it is not asking or expecting too much that Christian men should do so. The charges that are laid upon us to be borne are trivial compared with the charges laid upon the Jews in the olden day.

Thirdly, *we need some practical abiding principle* like this to make sure that the principle of stewardship is a reality in our lives and that we do not inwardly find ourselves swept into self-deception. It is the easiest thing in the world for a man who does not deal with God in the matter of obligation as he does with his fellows to find that he has not been giving

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God his due. I will just ask any man who is here in this room this morning who has adopted the minimum principle of the tithe if he did not discover that in the old days he was outrageously robbing God. Just exactly as we need the Sabbath for some such purpose as this to make sure of the recognition of all time as sacred to the Lord of Life, just so do we need the recognition of our tithe obligation to God in the matter of our wealth.

In the fourth place, *God never would have ordered it, if it had been a mere transitory matter*: if it had not been for our good. He does not need tithes for himself. All ten-tenths of our wealth he can take away if he pleases. The principle of tithe giving is needed by man. He made it clear not as something for that time only but as something for all time. Man's moral constitution has not altered. The fact that it was good for man three thousand years ago is an evidence that it is good for man still. Our moral nature is the same across the lands and across the centuries, and the old principle was not a principle that belonged to a particular epoch; it was a principle that lay deep in human nature. That is why Mr. Ruskin speaks as he does in the "Seven Lamps of Architecture:"

"And let us not now lose sight of this broad

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and unabrogated principle—I might say incapable of being abrogated so long as men shall receive earthly gifts from God. Of all that they have His tithe must be rendered to Him, or insofar and insomuch He is forgotten; of the skill and of the treasure, of the strength and of the mind, of the time, and of the toil offering must be made reverently; and if there be any difference between the Levitical and the Christian offering, it is that the latter may be just so much the wider in its range as it is typical in its meaning, as it is thankful instead of sacrificial.”

Fifthly, *money is the most perilous thing* with which we have to cope, next to the baser, sensual nature. It is one of the most dangerous forces with which we have to deal. Money; we all know how perilous it is, how constantly through the New Testament the warnings are given. As Ruskin says in “Time and Tide:”

“First, have you observed that all Christ’s main teachings by direct order, by earnest parable, and by His own permanent emotion, regard the use and misuse of money? We might have thought, if we had been asked what a divine teacher was most likely to teach, that He would have left inferior persons to give directions about money; and Himself spoken only concerning faith and love, and the discipline of the passions, and the guilt of the crimes of soul against soul. But not so. He speaks in general terms of these. But He does not speak parables about them for all men’s memory, nor permit Himself fierce indignation against them, in all men’s sight.

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The Pharisees bring Him an adulteress. He writes her forgiveness on the dust of which He had formed her. Another despised of all for known sin, He recognized as a giver of unknown love. But He acknowledges no love in buyers and sellers in His house. One should have thought there were people in that house twenty times worse than they; Caiaphas and his like—false priests, false prayer-makers false leaders of the people—who needed putting to silence, or to flight, with darkest wrath. But the scourge is only against traffickers and thieves. The two most intense of all the parables; the two which lead the rest in love and in terror (this of the Prodigal, and of Dives) relate, both of them, to the management of riches. The practical order given to the only seeker of advice, of whom it is recorded that Christ 'loved him,' is briefly about his property. 'Sell that thou hast.'"

So it was throughout all our Lord's teaching. He realized that some of the sources of deepest peril to man in one sense lay in money. In order to escape that peril, we need the protecting grasp of some great and secure principle. Who does not know how serious this need is? We can think of friend after friend who in these last years has had wealth piled in upon him, and we have seen the spiritual atrophy, unless he clung to some simple principle of action like this to hold him secure.

In the sixth place, *our Lord himself recognized and approved the validity of the principle of the*

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tithe. He said to the Scribes and the Pharisees: "You give tithes, and this you ought to have done." So many times now do we say that the Old Testament laws are abrogated in Christ. The types and shadows were fulfilled and terminated in Christ, but the moral law was not terminated in Christ. None of these moral ideals did Christ abrogate. He reinforced and sanctioned every one of them, and poured upon each one of them the burden of a greater obligation. He explicitly endorsed the tithe. "You give tithes, and this ought you to have done."

Seventhly, *there is no objection that holds against the principle of the tithe that does not hold also against the principle of the Sabbath Day.* Both rest on the same ground of Old Testament sanction, New Testament recognition, moral claim and adaptation. And, if the Sabbath had fallen into neglect as the tithe has done, the same arguments would be raised against its revival which are raised against the tithe. And the gains of Sabbath keeping are the gains of tithe giving too. I leave it to every one of you if the scrupulous recognition of the Sabbath Day does not pour a holiness over a man's conception of trusteeship in regard to all his time. It is said by some that the conception is legalistic and cramping. Is

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the law of the Sabbath legalistic and cramping? We look back with joy in our own lives to the principle of the Sabbath; to its emancipation of the soul from the serfdom of trivial and visible things; to its recognition of our glorious freedom, our right to take our hand off our common tasks one day in seven and to use it in the fellowship and worship of God. Every argument for keeping the Sabbath Day holy upholds the principle of the tithe.

Eighth, *it is the only sure way of giving God his right share.* If we say with regard to every other obligation, "Now I will scrupulously regard that what I owe to every other creditor I will certainly pay;" and then take the view that for the Lord of All we will pick up the crumbs that are left at the end, the chance is that He will get less than His right in what we have to give and spend. The only sure way of securing to the uses of God in the extension of His kingdom what it needs is to set aside carefully for Him the first tenth. I wonder sometimes whether that instinct did not account for the change in the Lord's Day. We from the seventh to the first day of the week. are often hard put to it, to give our Scriptural grounds for the change. If you rest it on any legalistic grounds, the Old Testament principle is clear—the seventh day. Why did the Chris-

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tians swing around to the first? First, the memories of the resurrection; second, there was the feeling, "Perhaps I may not have the seventh day this week. I will make sure that God has his day before anybody else. The first I will give to Him." And through the years the Christian conscience has insisted that it must be so. The same instinct will govern our hearts, if we allow it, in regard to our wealth, which is only time and strength embodied in a transportable asset.

Ninth, *it is only so that the causes of Christ in the world will get what they need.* They never will get it by any mere system, never by any haphazard method, by allowing every man to whittle out his own principle; it will only be when the whole Church generously yields itself to some corporate principle that bears a definite relation to all its life. The general adoption of the principle of the tithe throughout the Church would pour into all the treasuries of the agencies of the Church and the great philanthropies and movements of charity and good will all that they would need for the work that must be done, and we shall not be likely to accomplish it in any but this simple, fundamental, ethical way.

Tenth, I think every man will find, as every man who has passed through the experience

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can testify, that *the acceptance of a principle like this marks a distinct era of spiritual enlargement in his life.* It carries him forward and leads him out into a wider expanse. The whole thought of God's love and presence and human duty becomes more vivid. I am not speaking here out of the air. I am speaking out of the experience of many in this room who look back to such a time as marking the beginning of a new era in their lives.

In the eleventh place, *it may bring the great religious expansion and awakening for which we long.*

“Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

(MAL. 3:10)

I suppose we have many times stumbled at Horace Bushnell's word on this subject and wondered whether for once one of the greatest spiritual voices of his time had not missed the true note when he said: “One more revival, only once more is needed, the revival of Christian stewardship, the consecration of the money power to God. When that revival comes the Kingdom of God will come in a day.” But may this not be true? Mr. Glad-

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stone even went so far as to say: "I believe that the diffusion of the principle and practice of systematic beneficence will prove the moral specific of our age."

Lastly, I believe in this principle because, regardless of anything that will flow from it, *it is fundamentally right*. It does not matter what effect it may have on our lives, whether it pinches or cramps. We believe in it because we think it is right. I liked a letter that appeared in the *Sunday School Times* a few years ago. A number of letters had been published telling of the prosperity which had followed the adoption of tithe giving. One man wrote that he had an utterly contrary experience from the rest, and told a long story of the struggle that he had undergone, growing harder and harder even since he had adopted that principle. Shortly after there was a letter from Canada which said that what the last man wrote, who had done it because it was right in spite of the hardship it brought, had touched the writer as no experience of prosperity had done, and he also had begun what clearly seemed to him now the thing to do because, and only because, it was right.

I do not mean to say that the privilege of giving a tithe is all that there is to proportionate giving, or that it exhausts the principle

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of stewardship. There will be men whose duty and privilege it will be to give two-tenths or nine-tenths. I am only setting forth some of the reasons for believing that the practice of the tithe is the best method for securing the principle of stewardship an initial grip of reality on life.

Let me lay the emphasis lastly on the rich privilege of being justified in giving at least a tenth of our income. I have a right to take all the money that comes to me and before I do anything whatever with any of it to set aside a tenth for the Lord. What a joy that brings into life, that we may simply act as banker for God with reference to this, to spend for His work. Mr. Gladstone wrote of this to a son who was then in residence at Oxford University, in which he suggested eight rules, the observance of which would be conducive to the highest interests of his son's life, literary and moral and spiritual. Among the suggestions was the following on the use of money:

“In regard to money—there is a great advantage in its methodical use. Especially is it wise to dedicate a certain portion of our means to purposes of charity and religion, and this is more easily begun in youth than in after-life. The greatest advantage of making a little fund of this kind is that when we are asked to give, competition is not between self on the one hand and any charity on the other,

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but between the different purposes of religion and charity with one another, among which we ought to make the most careful choice. It is desirable that the tenth of our means be dedicated to God, and it tends to bring a blessing on the rest. No one can tell the richness of the blessings that come to those who thus honor the Lord with their substance."

This practice delivers one from the worry of debating every separate appeal that comes, and it makes him a free and glad trustee.

I can remember still the very hour that all this first pressed on me in 1892 in the old First Church at Auburn. Horace Pitkin, who was then a student in the theological seminary, who later died as one of the martyrs in the Boxer tempest in China, read a paper on proportionate giving and the principle of the tithe. I never had seen this truth until that morning, and it burst on me as clear as sunlight that this was the right, the privilege and the duty of Christians. And if only the Christian Church would come to it, my friends, *what could we not do?*

Christian Stewardship Principles

1. God is the owner of all things.
2. Every man is a steward and must give account for all that is entrusted to him.
3. God's ownership and man's stewardship ought to be acknowledged.
4. This acknowledgment requires, as part of its expression, the setting apart for the extension of the Kingdom of Christ such a portion of income as is recognized by the individual to be the Will of God.*
5. The separated portion ought to be administered for the Kingdom of Christ and the remainder recognized as no less a trust.

*In the Scriptures the tenth is recognized as such acknowledgment. The proportion should increase as income increases. The Federal Income Tax Law exempts to 15 per cent. of income given for the purposes of religion, charity, etc.

The Ten Million League

The Ten Million League is a league of all persons in every communion who, in loving loyalty to their Lord, purpose to set apart a definite first proportion of income as an acknowledgment of God's ownership and their stewardship. Each communion is to make its own interpretation of Christian stewardship principles, and the total enrolments will compose the final count of the army of Ten Millions.

For further information address

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